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Dr Neil Byron
Commissioner of Inquiry
Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations
Productivity Commission
LB2, Collins Street East
Melbourne Victoria 8003

Dear Sir

As an organisation in regional New South Wales representing businesses, the Gunnedah Chamber of Commerce and Industry has resolved to make this submission following a resolution at its meeting on 8 July 2003.

This submission relates to the NSW Western Region Assessment of the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion Assessment. The Resource and Conservation Assessment Council (RACAC) through the Resource and Conservation Division of Planning NSW called for submissions in 2002, prior to a foreseen determination by the NSW Government on the future management of the public land in the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion (BBSB).

The current processes undertaken by agencies of the NSW Government to recategorise land in the BBSB in the context of the *Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997*, *Threatened Species Conservation Amendment Act 2002*, and the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* have caused a great deal of concern in this community. The process has been long and threatening, with NSW Government decision timeframes repeatedly extended – leaving communities and businesses in a “no man’s land”. Such is still the case.

In this region, the concern relates to a question of the viability of the timber industry in Gunnedah and the BBSB region generally. Issues include job security for those currently employed in the timber industry, a general concern amongst business owners, and nervousness in investors in the BBSB. The issues arise with the possibility of an impending deleterious impact on the Gunnedah and wider BBSB economy, should the NSW Government determine to put in place one of the currently considered options which would drastically decrease the current area from which timber can be sustainably sourced.

However, there is as yet no determination. The community consultative process, whilst essential, has in itself had deleterious effects on investor confidence and economic and social stability of this community. This has been the case for the last two-three years.

As part of and in reaction to the consultative process, various groups put forward options relating to, and revising, the area of nature reserves, state forest, conservation areas etc. These options have been examined in the context of the manner in which they impact on Aboriginal culture and heritage, timber industry, job security, industry development opportunities and management of public land.

The favoured option by this Chamber is the Brigalow Region United Stakeholders (BRUS) option, which we believe delivers a balanced and sustainable outcome for all stakeholders.

However, no determination or announcements have been made. The legislation by its very consideration through the process of community consultation has had a deleterious effect. The test of the 'adequacy of assessments of economic and social impacts' cannot be made until a decision had been made by NSW Government. Following that decision, a further submission will be made if there is sufficient time for its inclusion in the commission's inquiry process.

Yours sincerely

Ann Sims
Executive Officer